

AN OVERVIEW OF **LYNCHBURG READS**

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Nancy Pearl, a Seattle librarian (now retired), started the *One City, One Book* craze with *If All of Seattle Read the Same Book* in 1998. The program has since been renamed *Seattle Reads*. Other communities were quick to follow. See <http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0206/stateideas.html>

In Lynchburg, Friends Board member Kim Carey brought the concept to the Board (Ellen Nygaard was President) just as staff were beginning to discuss whether the concept would work in Lynchburg. The decision to adopt the program was an easy one for both groups.

In 2002, Lynchburg launched its first **Lynchburg Reads** program. In honor of the 100th birthday of John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* was chosen as the inaugural book. The program featured book discussions, movie screenings, and a lecture by Steinbeck scholar Susan Shillinglaw. Jackson Benson, another Steinbeck scholar, participated in our book discussions via speakerphone. Coincidentally, EC Glass Theatre had scheduled *Of Mice and Men* in its small theatre and added 2 performances, thanks to *Lynchburg Reads*.

We followed with *The Color of Water* by James McBride. This began a strong partnership with Randolph College (then R-MWC) in 2003. Mr. McBride and his jazz band performed to a packed house (900) in Smith Hall. We were fortunate to be awarded a few grants to help pay the \$10,000 fee for our featured author. We received an unsolicited \$1,000 grant from Frito-Lay. The daughter of one of the Friends of the Library board members had applied for the grant for the program and didn't tell us about it until the grant was awarded. We received another \$500 grant from the Lynchburg Retail Merchants Association, and our Friends of the Library group also provided \$500. – see http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/VALib/v49_n4/michalik.html

Sharyn McCrumb was our featured author in 2004, as we read *The Ballad of Frankie Silver*. Her fee was \$1,000; she was accompanied by guitarist Jack Henshelwood, who charged \$300. About 400 attended her talk at R-MWC's Smith Auditorium.

In 2005, David Baldacci graciously agreed to appear for free to talk about *Wish You Well*. He spoke to a packed crowd (400) in R-MWC's Huston Chapel. In appreciation, the Friends donated \$250 to his "Wish You Well" foundation, which promotes literacy.

Another gracious author, Orson Scott Card came at no cost to us in 2006 as we read *Ender's Game*. We are grateful to Danny Givens of Givens Books for arranging Mr. Card's appearance. About 300 attended his talk in RMWC's Smith Auditorium.

In 2007 we partnered with the Lynchburg Holocaust Education Foundation to bring Gerda Weissmann Klein to Lynchburg to talk about her book *All But My Life*, the story of her experiences in World War II as Polish Jew. She spoke to all students (1,500) at EC Glass in person and via closed circuit TV and to 400 in Huston Chapel that evening. Copies of the Academy–Award winning documentary based on her book were made available and shown in several public venues.

From its inception, Lynchburg Reads committed to chose titles which the schools would support. EC Glass has been a strong partner, encouraging, and even requiring, students to read the books. With the exception of Steinbeck, all of the authors spoke to a group of students at EC Glass, in addition to the public presentation

In 2008, *Lynchburg Reads* expanded its reach by partnering with Lynchburg College. Their annual *Rosel Schewel Lecture on Education and Human Diversity* provided funding (\$10,000, which was donated to the Spelman College Scholarship Fund)) to bring Spelman College President Beverly Daniel Tatum to Lynchburg to speak about her book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* The popular book was chosen specifically to support the city's new and innovative *Community Dialogue on Race and Racism*. Students from Amherst County High School joined E. C. Glass student leaders for an intimate lunch with Dr. Tatum; her afternoon talk to the E. C. Glass student body was web cast to Heritage and Amherst High Schools; and she spoke to a packed house (500) at Lynchburg College that evening. Both presentations were video taped and broadcast numerous times on the Lynchburg City Schools Educational Channel and on Channel 15, the Lynchburg Government Channel.

After two very serious books in a row, in 2009, the Committee decided to use a totally differ genre and chose Carrie Brown's *Rope Walk*. An English professor at Sweet Briar College, Mrs. Brown, also, donated her time. Over the spring, she spoke to several area high school classes and at the Library Friends' first-ever fund-raiser Author Dinner, *A Gathering of Readers*, which drew 70 attendees. Her presentation at Randolph College was attended by about 100, our smallest crowd, but we felt the 70 who were at the dinner did not come to the public talk.

In 2010, a second partnership with the Holocaust Education Foundation and RC provided the funds to bring John Bul Dau, author of the internationally acclaimed *GOD GREW TIRED OF US*, about the Lost Boys of the Sudan, to Lynchburg. Mr. Dau's talk to the EC Glass student body (1,500) was filmed and shown on the city school's educational channel. His evening Talk to 225 at RC was, also, filmed for the city government channel. He, also, spoke briefly to 45 persons who attended a dinner at RC just before his public talk. For the first time, a companion book was selected for younger children. The library's Youth Services staff recommended *My Name is Sangoel*, the story of an immigrant boy who teaches his classmates to correctly pronounce his name. Drawing on an earlier experience using EC Glass athletes to read to 4th and 5th graders, 14 athletes read to 420 students. All elementary school libraries were given a copy of the book.

For 2011, budget concerns caused the Friends Board to plan to switch to a biennial schedule, skipping 2011. Happily, Randolph College approached us about using Frances Mayes' *UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN* as the 2011 title. Mrs. Mayes had attended the College and approached them about speaking there, at no cost. An enthusiastic crowd of about 200 attended. It was an excellent talk.

In 2012, we were excited to feature a local author, Bob Gillette's book, **The Virginia Plan**, the story of Mr. Thalhimer's plan to save Jewish agricultural students by inviting them to a farm he purchased near Burkeville. He spoke at Randolph College on April 2; about 75 attended. He, also, gave generously of his time to speak with several school classes, the library's book club, and several private book clubs, tailoring his talk to each group.

In 2013, *LIFE OF PI* by Juan Martel was chosen because of its popularity with high school students (both E C Glass and Heritage used it with AP classes) and the late fall movie release tie-in. Mr. Martel was not able to travel to Lynchburg, but he graciously agreed to a SKYPE interview, at no cost. On March 14, the Friends sponsored a pre-event Indian-themed dinner at Randolph College which drew 80 guests. At 7:30 p.m., the Skype connection was activated and he spoke and answered questions for some 60 minutes to an enthusiastic audience of over 200. Library staff sponsored an art competition for high school age students and the book was read by the library's Book Club.